

Ferruginous Hawk  
17 Jan 1989  
Benton Township, Fremont Co. Co., IA  
\*Silcock  
IBL 59:51, 61:84

Record Number: 89-05  
Classification: NA

## DOCUMENTATION

Ross Silcock

## REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:51  
Records Committee: IBL 61:85

VOTE: 5 A-D, 1 NA, 1 abstain

A-D. The analysis is convincing.

A-D. I am voting to accept this report based on the preponderance of the evidence, and despite what could be a fatal flaw in the documentation. The flaw involves the sketch of the bird, showing the configuration of the wing's windows. In Ferruginous, these should be roughly perpendicular to the body, not parallel as shown in the sketch. The observer's written description appears more consistent with Ferruginous. Is this just a case of bad art? The balance of the description was thorough, and strongly supported Ferruginous. The observer tended to rely heavily upon after-the-fact research, but based conclusions generally on notes made in the field.

A-D. For 1) Dark tail band with no white after 2) Jizz 3) Triangular upper white marks 4) No dark patagial marks 5) observed for 15 min. Against 1) Underside not seen good enough to see leg markings. Excellent documentation with the kind of field marks I want to see when I mark a Ferruginous for Iowa.

A-D. Very thorough description of imm. Ferruginous. Key field marks seen well and seem to eliminate other raptors.

NA. This is a difficult bird to evaluate. I would not identify hawks by shape, behavior or habitat, except at a hawk watch or within the normal range. Flight patterns call attention to the possibility of the bird being unusual, but morphologic confirmation is essential for an unusual raptor. That unmentionable four-letter word means to me, "I can't describe this feature, so you'll have to take my word for it." The observer does not spell out how well he saw the bird, but it does not sound like it was seen too well: no distance given, 15 minutes while chasing in car, underparts not seen well. I believe that the best fit for this description is Rough-legged Hawk based on the following: (1) Upperwing--not splotchy, white patch, dark outer primaries fits immature Ferruginous or Rough-leg. On 2 April 1989, I saw a rough-leg with white patches similar to Silcock's sketch (i.e., three points of light). Dunne shows white patches in both immature and adult rough-legs (p 43), while Clarke says that adults don't show this mark. (2) Tail--white with terminal 1/5 dark brown. Immature Ferruginous said to be gray-brown with basal third white and silvery below. Rough-leg has wide dusky terminal band (also from below). (3) Head--even pale brown. Ferruginous appears light headed with dark cap and eyeline. Rough-leg is creamy with brown streaking and dark



eyeline. (4) Body and underwing--dark upper belly extending to underwing. Immature Ferruginous has clear white underwing with dark wrist comma (Clark) and Dunne illustrates same for immature (C on page 48). If the underwing coverts were dark like a Prairie Falcon, the patagial mark could not be evaluated. An immature rough-leg should have a dark belly and dark wrist mark with lighter coverts, but a male rough-leg has a less dark belly and wrist and darker coverts as in the bird described. I think the best fit is an adult or subadult male Rough-legged Hawk. It is not an adult Ferruginous. An immature Ferruginous should appear white below, light-headed, and not have a definite tail band. The lack of prominent wrist marks could be due to the bird being a male and poor viewing of underparts.

A-D. I was impressed with the details given for this observation.

REVOTE: 3 A-D, 3 NA, 1 abstain

NA. Many features are very, very suggestive of Ferruginous and I voted AD the first time around because it sounded very reasonable. A closer second study gives me some doubt, hence a change in vote. Under Elimination of Similar Species, Rough-legged Hawk is firmly eliminated by two characters: absence of characteristic Rough-leg underwing pattern and method of hunting. As the first round NA voter commented, a behavior like this can certainly help pick out a bird to look at but is not diagnostic by itself. Regarding the underwing pattern, observer pointed out several times that underside was not seen well. This is a great opportunity for research and discussion, but if there is room for doubt, we can't accept it.

NA. With reluctance, I must agree with the dissenting vote that Rough-legged Hawk is not unequivocally eliminated. In addition to the plumage similarities noted, the Rough-leg could exhibit all the behavior characteristics noted in this bird.

A-D. NA discounts jizz or behavior characteristics such as low flight. This is information observed and should always be reported, and in this case supports ID. NA ignores the report of no white-tipped tail which eliminates Rough-legged Hawk. NA also analyzes that the patagial mark could not be evaluated because of dark underwing coverts. This counterdicts the documentor's report of light off-white underwings with lower breast mottling.

A-D. Excellent description of Ferruginous Hawk. Contrary to the NA, I would say that shape, behavior, and habitat can be very useful when combined with other field marks, as in the case of this record.

NA. Discuss at meeting. See my previous analysis.

A-D. I don't know how else you would go about identifying hawks than by some reference to shape and behavior. A brownish distal band was mentioned not terminal 1/5 dark brown. As described light-even pale brown could be light headed compared to rest of body (not mentioned). I do believe Rough-leg is adequately eliminated.

Abstain. I suppose I abstain. However, I want to comment on the NA. This NA is perceptive in that it notes the difficulty of separating imm Ferrug HK from some plumages of Rough-legged Hawk.

However, I believe there are flaws in the analysis. First, while I don't like the word 'jizz' ('gestalt' is better) all birders use it to ID birds (Rock Doves flying over? woodpeckers in flight? etc). The bird was well seen, except for the underparts--I would tend to not accept or deny the ID based on underparts characters, except for lack of patagial mark, which I carefully looked for and did not find. "Morphologic analysis" has problems = tail = fits imm ferrug, not rough-leg. Latter shows 50% or more of tail dark. Head = imm Ferrug has brown, even-colored head, similar to Rough-leg, but more featureless. The darker coloration I saw was not extensive, did not obscure the forepart of the underwing (patagial area clear). As I stated in my doc, I believe the darker area was a carryover of juv or imm plge. There was little or no dark coloration on underbody, which rules out most roughlegs I believe.  
SENT TO: Ross Silcock [on committee]



DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-05

What species? FERRUGINOUS HAWK How many? 1 (IMM)

Location? BENTON TWP, FREMONT CO., IA.

Type of Habitat? OPEN MISSOURI RIVER BOTTOM; SOYBEAN TRIBBLE FIELDS

When? date(s): JAN 17, 1989 time: 3:30 to 3:45 PM

Who? your name and address: ROSS SILCOCK [Signature]

Others with you: NONE

Others before or after you: NONE

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

SEE ATTACHED COPY OF FIELD NOTES MADE AT TIME OF OBSERVATION. I HAVE SEEN THOUSANDS OF RED TAILS AND ONLY CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE ID IF SOMETHING SUGGESTS OTHER THAN THE WIDE RANGE OF CHARACTERS POSSIBLE IN REDTAILS. THIS BIRD (FIRST SEEN SITTING ON A 6' POST) LOOKED DIFFERENT, SO I TURNED AROUND, AND FOUND THAT IT WAS FLYING ABOUT 1-2' ABOVE THE GROUND. I FOLLOWED IN MY CAR AND WATCHED AS IT FLEW, AT TIMES AS CLOSE AS 50 YDS. <sup>SEE</sup> ATTACHED NOTES ON ID.

Similar species; how eliminated:

(AFTER WRITING MY FIELD NOTES AT THE SITE OF OBSERVATION AND RETURNING HOME LATER)  
SEE ATTACHED DISCUSSION. I FOUND THE STANDARD FIELD GUIDES MOST UNHELPFUL. DUNNE ET AL'S DISCUSSION OF FERRUGINOUS WAS TREMENDOUS, INDICATING VARIATION IN FERRUGINOUS HAWKS, AND ESPECIALLY IN DISCUSSION OF FLIGHT CHARACTERISTICS, 'JIZZ', AND BEHAVIOR.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? N/A  
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

PERFECT LIGHTING - I WAS ABLE TO GET 'UP-SUN' IN MY CAR FOR MOST OF THE OBSERVATION, USING 10X50 BINOCES.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

HAVE SEEN SEVERAL ADULTS, THOUSANDS OF REDTAILS OF ALL VARIETIES, ROCKLEGS, ETC.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

NONE BEFORE FIELD NOTES; DUNNE ET AL (HAWK) ~~CONFIRMED~~ CONFIRMED MY FIELD ID - SEE ID DISCUSSION.

How long before field notes made? ON SPOT this form completed? 4 MRS

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

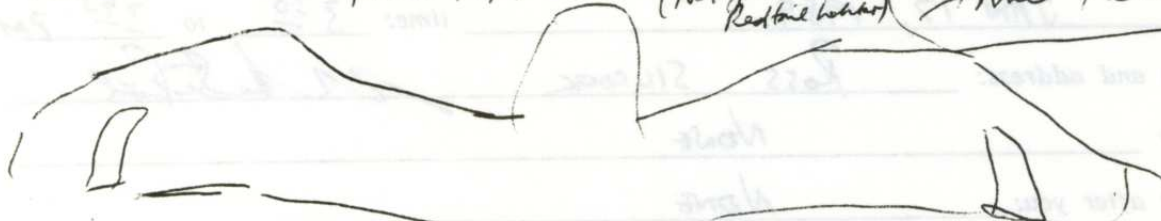


1/17/89 3:30-3:45 pm

Habitat - Mo bottomlands - open country

1-2 mi from Leakesville.  
Redtail + this one seen in same stable fields  
(NOT generally Redtail habitat)

From Ferguson's Hawk?



White  
 patch - rear  
 half - 3/4 of  
 inner primary  
 very prominent  
 & flashing in  
 certain light

white  
 dark band

NOT a Florida's RT - not at all pale appearing  
 brownish bird  
 in general, not splashed like inner RT the  
 dark  
 NO potential mark.  
 outer  
 Upper primary is darker  
 than inner primary

Head pale brown, even color  
 terminal  
 upper side tail white, dark brown bands

Flew 1-2 ft above ground human, 1st <sup>(I believe for about 3/4 mile)</sup> <sub>near</sub>

Darker coloration  
 in upper belly area,  
 out more inner  
 underwings (seemingly  
 of axillars of primary tail)

seen perched on 4<sup>th</sup> post.

Flights show, deliberate, flaps, then glide

Wings held level, no noticeable dihedral  
 in manner wings held  
 somewhat reminiscent of Cooper's - possibly  
 influenced by wind - flew directly into 15-20 mph  
 south west wind.

58° sunny, clear, like perfect



# DESCRIPTION OF BIRD

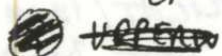
89-05

OVERALL IMPRESSION WAS OBVIOUSLY OF A BUTED, BUT THESE FEATURES IMMEDIATELY STOOD OUT AS NOT USUAL TO A RED TAIL:

- ① TAIL APPEARED LONG - PROPORTION A LOT LIKE N. HARRIER
- ② TAIL WAS MOSTLY OFF-WHITE, EXCEPT FOR A BROWNISH BAND OCCUPYING PERHAPS  $\frac{1}{5}$  OF TAIL ~~IN~~ DISTAL AREA. (VIEWED FROM ABOVE) THERE WAS NO WHITE TIP-TAIL.
- ③ VERY PROMINENT FROM ABOVE WERE WHITE AREAS IN PIMMIES WHICH, AS NEARLY AS I COULD ASCERTAIN, OCCUPIED MOST OF REAR  $\frac{3}{4}$  OF THE INNER PIMMIES. THIS WHITE AREA WAS REMINISCENT OF IMM. CROWEN EAGLE'S PROMINENCE, BUT WAS LOCATED A LITTLE FURTHER "IN" TOWARDS THE BIRD'S BODY. WHILE OBSERVING THE BIRD IN FLIGHT (FROM ABOVE - I WAS ON A DIRT ROAD AND THE BIRD WAS FLYING ABOUT 1-2 FT ABOVE THE GROUND) ~~VERY~~ I REMEMBERED FROM PRIOR READING OF DUNNE ET AL THE IDEA OF "THREE POINTS OF LIGHT" OR SAMESUCH WHICH IS VERY CHARACTERISTIC OF FERUGINOUS HAWKS. THIS WAS VERY OBVIOUS ON THIS BIRD AND I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT ON A RED TAIL (EVEN CLOSELY SIMILAR!).
- ④ THE HABITAT + BEHAVIOR WAS VERY UN-RED-TAIL LIKE: OPEN GROUND AT LEAST 1-2 MILES FROM THE LOESS HILLS, AND THE HIGHEST I SAW THE BIRD IN 15 MIN OF OBSERVATION WAS 6', WHEN PERCHED ON A POST AT INITIAL SIGHTING. IN FLIGHT ACROSS 2 SEPARATE BEAN FIELDS AND A ROAD AND ROAD-DITCH, THE BIRD WAS NEVER MORE THAN 6' OFF THE GROUND. ACCORDING TO DUNNE ET AL THIS IS VERY CHARACTERISTIC OF A HUNTING FERUGINOUS.
- ⑤ THE WINGS WERE HELD WITH THE 'WRISTS' HELD SOMEWHAT AHEAD OF THE REST OF THE WING (SEE MY SKETCH). THIS REMINDED ME OF AN OSPREY'S WINGS TO SOME EXTENT, AND, I FOUND LATER IS ALSO TYPICAL OF A FERUGINOUS WHILE HUNTING (DUNNE ET AL).



- ⑥ HEAD WAS APPARENTLY UNMARKED AND WAS A PALE BROWNISH COLOR.
- ⑦ UNDERPARTS (NOT WELL SEEN) WERE BASICALLY OFF-WHITE, WITH A RATHER EXTENSIVE MOTTLED AREA IN THE LOWER BREAST REGION, EXTENDING INTO THE WING COVERTS, OR AXILLARY AREA, WHERE THE MOTTLING FADED OUT. THERE WAS NO DARK PATELIAL MARK AS A REDTAIL THIS BROWN WOULD DEFINITELY POSSESS. (BY THE WAY; THIS BIRD WAS IN NO WAY A KRIDER'S REDTAIL - UNDERPARTS ~~ARE~~ NOT PURE WHITE, NO RED OR PINK IN TAIL, FLIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OBVIOUSLY NOT A REDTAIL - PROBABLY MY EXPERIENCE WITH RED-TAIL 'JIZZ' ALLOWS ME TO ELIMINATE A KRIDER'S RED-TAIL - HEAD PATTERN (DARK ABOVE, LIGHT BELOW FOR KRIDER'S) WRONG.) I CAN BEST DESCRIBE THE UNDERWING PATTERN AS SOMEWHAT BETWEEN "C" AND "B" ON PAGE 48 OF DUNNE ET AL.



### ELIMINATION OF SIMILAR SPECIES

THE ONLY POSSIBILITY WHICH IS REALISTIC TO CONSIDER IS REDTAILED HAWK, OR POSSIBLY ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK.

WHILE SIMILAR IN 'JIZZ' TO A ROUGH-LEG (LONG TAIL, FLIGHT WITH 'CROOKED' (=OSPREY-LIKE) WINGS, DARKER MOTTLING UNDERNEATH, LONGISH WINGS), ROUGHLEG CAN BE ELIMINATED BY THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERS - ~~THESE POINTS ARE NOT~~ ~~NEVER SEEN~~, ABSENCE OF CHARACTERISTIC UNDERWING PATTERN, INCLUDING SIGNIFICANT WRIST MARK (FERRUGINOUS SHOULD SHOW THIS TO SOME EXTENT ACCORDING TO DUNNE ET AL, BUT I DID NOT SEE IT; REMEMBER I DID NOT SEE THE UNDERPARTS WELL), AND METHOD OF HUNTING - I HAVE NEVER SEEN A ROUGHLEG FLY THIS LOW OVER THE GROUND FOR THIS LONG (ABOUT A MILE) - ~~VERY~~ MUCH LOWER AND <sup>MORE</sup> CONSISTENTLY SO THAN A HARRIER.

REGARDING ELIMINATION OF RED-TAIL - I REALLY THINK IT IS EASIER TO ELIMINATE RED-TAIL THAN ROUGHLEG BASED ON 'JIZZ'. THE TAIL WAS TOO LONG, WAS NEVER SPREAD, AND WINGS WERE LONGER THAN RED-TAILS. TAIL PATTERN AND 'THREE POINTS OF LIGHT' COMBINATION ALSO IS ~~NOT~~ NEVER SEEN ON A REDTAIL, ESPECIALLY WHEN VIEWED FROM ABOVE. (THE SIMILARITY TO ROUGHLEG ~~IN~~ IN PATTERN CAN BE SEEN IN THE FRONT END PAPER IN DUNNE ET AL). HABITAT AND BEHAVIOR



ALSO ARE IMPORTANT - WHILE REDTAILS ARE VERY COMMON IN FREMONT COUNTY, THEY ARE DEFINITELY NOT COMMON ON THE OPEN MISSOURI BOTTOMLANDS. REDTAIL IS A BIRD OF EDGE HABITAT. I ALWAYS LOOK CLOSELY AT ANY BUTED SEEN FROM OCTOBER TO APRIL ON THE OPEN BOTTOMLANDS. I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANY OTHER BUTED FLY AS LOW TO THE GROUND FOR AS LONG AS THIS BIRD - WHEN I SAY LOW, I MEAN 1-2 FT ABOVE THE GROUND. AT NO TIME WAS THE BIRD HIGHER THAN 6', AND THAT WAS WHEN PERCHED ON POSSIBLY THE LOWEST POST FOR SOME DISTANCE. EVEN A HARLIER WILL RISE AND FALL WHILE HUNTING. THIS BIRD STAYED LOW, IN THE MANNER OF A HUNTING GOLDEN CREST (WHICH I HAVE SEEN IN WESTERN KANSAS) - A POINT ALSO MENTIONED BY DUNNE ET AL. ANOTHER POINT NOTED BY DUNNE ET AL AND ALSO SHOWN IN MY SKETCH (PURPOSELY!) AND I MENTIONED IN MY FIELD NOTES WAS THE DIPPER-LIKE CROOK IN THE WINGS - WHILE FLYING LOW OVER THE GROUND. DUNNE ET AL NOTE THAT THIS IS CHARACTERISTIC OF A HUNTING FERUGINOS.